

EPICTETUS

Discourses and  
Selected Writings

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PENGUIN BOOKS

BOOK I

I 1 *Concerning what is in our power and what is not*

[1] In general, you will find no art or faculty that can analyse itself, therefore none that can approve or disapprove of itself.

[2] The art of grammar is restricted to analysing and commenting on literature. Music is confined to the analysis of harmony. [3] Consequently neither of them analyses itself. Now, if you are writing to a friend, the art of grammar will help you decide what words to use; but it will not tell you whether it is a good idea to write to your friend in the first place. Music is no different; whether this is a good time to sing and play, or a bad one, the art of music by itself cannot decide.

[4] So what can? The faculty that analyses itself as well as the others, namely, the faculty of reason. Reason is unique among the faculties assigned to us in being able to evaluate itself – what it is, what it is capable of, how valuable it is – in addition to passing judgement on others.

[5] What decides whether a sum of money is good? The money is not going to tell you; it must be the faculty that makes use of such impressions – reason. [6] Reason, in addition, takes the measure of music, grammar and the other arts, judging their benefit and deciding when it's best to use them.

[7] So it's only appropriate that the gods have given us the best and most efficacious gift: the ability to make good use of impressions. Other capacities they did not put in our power.

[8] Was it because they did not want to? Personally, I believe that they would have endowed us with those others too, had they been able. But they were not. [9] Since we are on earth,

you see, bound to a material body and material things, we can hardly avoid being limited by these extraneous factors.

[10] Well, what does Zeus say? 'Epictetus, if it were possible, I would have made your little body and possessions both free and unrestricted. [11] As it is, though, make no mistake: this body does not belong to you, it is only cunningly constructed clay. [12] And since I could not make the body yours, I have given you a portion of myself instead, the power of positive and negative impulse, of desire and aversion – the power, in other words, of making good use of impressions. If you take care of it and identify with it, you will never be blocked or frustrated; you won't have to complain, and never will need to blame or flatter anyone. [13] Is that enough to satisfy you?'

'It's more than enough. Thank you.'

[14] And yet, while there is only the one thing we can care for and devote ourselves to, we choose instead to care about and attach ourselves to a score of others: to our bodies, to our property, to our family, friends and slaves. [15] And, being attached to many things, we are weighed down and dragged along with them. [16] If the weather keeps us from travelling, we sit down, fret, and keep asking, 'Which way is the wind blowing?' 'From the north.' 'That's no good. When will it blow from the west?' 'When it wants to, or rather when Aeolus wants it to; because God put Aeolus in charge of the winds, not you.' [17] What should we do then? Make the best use of what is in our power, and treat the rest in accordance with its nature. And what is its nature? However God decides.

[18] 'Must I be beheaded now, and alone?' Well, do you want everyone to be beheaded just because misery loves company? [19] Why not hold out your neck the way Lateranus did at Rome, when condemned by Nero to be beheaded? He held out his neck willingly to take the blow – but the blow was deficient, so he recoiled a bit, but then had enough self-command to offer his neck a second time. [20] And prior to that, when Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman, approached a certain man and asked him about the grounds of his offence, he replied, 'If I want anything, I will tell it to your master.'<sup>1</sup>

[21] What should we have ready at hand in a situation like this? The knowledge of what is mine and what is not mine, what I can and cannot do. [22] I must die. But must I die bawling? I must be put in chains – but moaning and groaning too? I must be exiled; but is there anything to keep me from going with a smile, calm and self-composed?

'Tell us your secrets.'

[23] 'I refuse, as this is up to me.'

'I will put you in chains.'

'What's that you say, friend? It's only my leg you will chain, not even God can conquer my will.'

[24] 'I will throw you into prison.'

'Correction – it is my body you will throw there.'

'I will behead you.'

'Well, when did I ever claim that mine was the only neck that couldn't be severed?'

[25] That's the kind of attitude you need to cultivate if you would be a philosopher, the sort of sentiments you should write down every day and put in practice.

[26] Thrasea used to say, 'I would sooner be killed today than banished tomorrow.'<sup>2</sup> [27] And what did Musonius say to him? 'If you choose death because it is the greater evil, what sense is there in that? Or if you choose it as the lesser evil, remember who gave you the choice. Why not try coming to terms with what you have been given?'

[28] Agrippinus used to say, 'I don't add to my troubles.' To illustrate, someone once said to him, 'You are being tried in the Senate – [29] good luck.' But it was eleven in the morning, and at that hour he was in the habit of taking his bath and exercise. 'Let us be off to exercise.' [30] When he was done, word came that he had been condemned. 'To exile,' he asked, 'or death?' 'Exile.' 'And my estate, what about that?' 'It has not been confiscated.' 'Well then, let us go to my villa in Aricia and have lunch there.' [31] This shows what is possible when we practise what is necessary, and make our desire and aversion safe against any setback or adversity. [32] 'I have to die. If it is now, well then I die now; if later, then now I will take my lunch, since the hour for lunch has arrived – and dying I will tend to later.'

How? As someone who knows that you have to return what belongs to somebody else.

#### I 4 *On progress*

[1] Whoever is making progress, after learning from philosophers that desire is directed toward good things and avoidance directed toward bad, and having also learned that impassivity and a good flow of life are not attained except through unerring desire and unfailing avoidance – that person will do away with desire altogether, or else defer it to another time, and exercise avoidance only on things within the moral sphere. [2] Because they know that if they try to avoid anything outside the moral sphere they are going to run into something contrary to their aversion and face disaster.

[3] But if virtue holds this promise – to secure happiness, impassivity, and a good flow of life – then progress toward virtue must involve progress toward these other states as well. [4] For wherever the perfection of anything tends, progress is always an approach towards the same thing.

[5] So how is it that, although we are now agreed about the nature of virtue, we still try to demonstrate progress in areas that are unrelated? What is the goal of virtue, after all, except a life that flows smoothly? [6] So who is making progress – the person who has read many of Chrysippus' books? [7] Is virtue no more than this – to become literate in Chrysippus? Because, if that's what it is, then progress cannot amount to anything more than learning as much Chrysippus as we can. [8] We

are agreed, however, that virtue produces one thing, while maintaining that the approach to it, progress, results in something different. [9] 'This person can read Chrysippus already by himself. You are making progress, by God,' someone says sarcastically. 'Some progress that is!' [10] 'Why do you make fun of him?' 'Well, why do you try to distract him from coming to an awareness of his faults?' Don't you want to show him the purpose of virtue, so that he will know what real progress consists in? [11] Look for it in your volition, friend – that is, in your desire and avoidance. Make it your goal never to fail in your desires or experience things you would rather avoid; try never to err in impulse and repulsion; aim to be perfect also in the practice of attention and withholding judgement. [12] But the first subjects are the most essential. If you aim to be perfect when you are still anxious and apprehensive, how have you made progress? [13] So let's see some evidence of it. But no, it's as if I were to say to an athlete, 'Show me your shoulders,' and he responded with, 'Have a look at my weights.' 'Get out of here with you and your gigantic weights!' I'd say, 'What I want to see isn't the weights but how you've profited from using them.'

[14] 'Take the treatise *On Impulse* and see how well I've read it.' Idiot. It's not *that* I'm after, I want to know how you put impulse and repulsion into practice, and desire and avoidance as well. I want to know how you apply and prepare yourself, and how you practise attention,\* so that I can decide whether with you these functions operate in harmony with nature. [15] If you *are*, in fact, acting in accord with nature, then show me, and I will be the first to say that you are making progress. But otherwise, be off, and rather than just comment on books, you might as well go write one yourself. But, in the end, what good will it do you? [16] You know that a whole book costs around five denarii.<sup>4</sup> Is the commentator, then, worth more than that? [17] Don't put your purpose in one place and expect to see progress made somewhere else.

\* The alterations of ἐπιβάλλεις to ἐπιβάλλῃ and προστίθεσαι to προτίθεσαι have been assumed in the translation, the latter ascertained by comparing πρόθεσις ('attention') in §11 above.

[18] Where is progress, then? If there is anyone who renounces externals and attends instead to their character, cultivating and perfecting it so that it agrees with nature, making it honest and trustworthy, elevated, free, unchecked and undeterred; [19] and if they've learned that whoever desires or avoids things outside their control cannot be free or faithful, but has to shift and fluctuate right along with them, subject to anyone with the power to furnish or deprive them of these externals; [20] and if from the moment they get up in the morning they adhere to their ideals, eating and bathing like a person of integrity, putting their principles into practice in every situation they face – the way a runner does when he applies the principles of running, or a singer those of musicianship [21] – that is where you will see true progress embodied, and find someone who has not wasted their time making the journey here from home.

[22] But anyone whose sole passion is reading books, and who does little else besides, having moved here for this – my advice for them is to go back home immediately and attend to business there, [23] because they left home for nothing. A student should practise how to expunge from his life sighs and sorrow, grief and disappointment, exclamations like 'poor me' and 'alas'; [24] he should learn what death is, as well as exile, jail and hemlock, so at the end of the day he can say, like Socrates in prison, 'Dear Crito, if it pleases the gods, so be it,'<sup>5</sup> – instead of, 'Poor me, an old man – is this what old age held in store for me?' [25] Don't imagine that I am referring to anyone humble or obscure, either; Priam says it, so does Oedipus. In fact, all the kings of legend can be found saying it. [26] For what else are tragedies but the ordeals of people who have come to value externals, tricked out in tragic verse?

[27] If I had to be deceived into believing that externals, which lie outside our power, are not man's proper concern, personally I would consent to such a deception, provided it really could enable me to live an untroubled life, in peace of mind. Which condition you prefer you can determine for yourself.

[28] What does Chrysippus give us? 'To make certain,' he

says, 'that these doctrines promising freedom from passion and serenity are legitimate, [29] take all my books,\* and you will find that the knowledge that makes me impassive is faithful to, and in accord with, nature.' How lucky we are! A benefactor – and how great a benefactor! – has shown us the way.<sup>6</sup> [30] Men have erected altars to Triptolemus<sup>7</sup> for giving us the art of farming; [31] but the man who found, disclosed and explained the truth to everyone – not the truth that pertains just to living, but to living well – who among you ever raised an altar, built a temple, erected a statue or venerated God for that? [32] We offer the gods sacrifice because they gave us wheat and wine. But they have produced such wonderful fruit in a human mind, as part of their plan to bestow on humanity the true secret of happiness: Are we going to forget to express our gratitude to them on that account?

### I 11 *Concerning family affection*

[1] During a visit from a magistrate Epictetus, in the course of conversing, asked the man whether he had a wife and children.

[2] He replied that he did. Epictetus then asked, 'And how do you like it?'

'I'm miserable,' he said.

So Epictetus asked, 'How so? [3] Men don't marry and have children in order to be miserable, but to be happy.'

[4] 'I'm so anxious about my poor children,' the man said, 'that the other day, when my little daughter was sick and appeared in danger of her life, I could not bear even to remain with her. I had to leave her side and go off until word was brought me that her condition had improved.'

'Well,' said Epictetus, 'do you think you acted correctly in this case?'

[5] 'I acted naturally,' he answered.

'If you can convince me that you acted naturally, I am ready on my side to show that anything done in accord with nature is done correctly.'

[6] 'It's what nearly all we fathers go through.'

'I don't dispute that reactions like yours occur,' Epictetus said. 'The point at issue between us is whether they ought to. [7] For by your reasoning we must allow that tumours happen for the good of the body, because they happen, and that doing wrong is in accord with nature, because all, or at least most of us, do wrong. [8] So show me how, exactly, you acted in accordance with nature.'

'I don't think I can,' the man said. 'Why don't you show me instead how it is *not* in accordance with nature, and shouldn't happen?'

So Epictetus said, [9] 'Well, if we were in any uncertainty about white and black things, what criterion would we adduce to choose between them?'

'Sight,' the man said.

'And what about things hot and cold, or hard and soft – what would decide in those cases?'

'Touch.'

[10] 'Now, since we have a difference of opinion about what is in agreement with nature and what is right and wrong, what standard should we apply here, do you think?'

'I don't know,' the man said.

[11] 'Well, ignorance in discriminating between colours, smells or flavours probably does no great harm. But not to know about right and wrong, about what is natural in man's case and what is not – is that a minor shortcoming, do you think?'

'No, a very great one, I admit.'

[12] 'Consider now – is everything that people judge to be good and appropriate rightly judged so? Can Jews, Syrians, Egyptians and Romans all be right in the opinions they have about food, for example?'<sup>18</sup>

'How could they?'

[13] 'Instead, if the opinions of the Egyptians are right, I suppose that the others are wrong. Or if the Jews are right, then the others can't be.'

'No, they cannot.'

[14] 'And where there is ignorance, there is also want of learning and instruction in essentials.'

The man agreed.

[15] 'Once you've realized this, you will occupy your mind and devote all your attention toward finding that standard that discriminates between what is natural and what is not; and then apply it to particular cases as they arise.'

[16] 'For the present, I can only offer the following by way of assistance toward solving our problem. [17] Tell me, then, do you think family affection is good and agrees with nature's norms?'

'I do.'

'Can family affection be good and natural,\* while what agrees with reason is not good?'

'Of course not.'

[18] 'So whatever is rational will not be in conflict with family affection.'

'I suppose not.'

'Because, if they were, one would be in agreement with nature while the other would have to conflict.'

'Correct.'

[19] 'So if there's anything out there that's both affectionate and rational, this we can safely say is also both right and good.'

'Agreed.'

[20] 'Now, to leave your child's side when she is sick, and go away, is not a rational act, and I don't suppose that even you will argue otherwise. But we still have to consider whether it is consistent with family affection.'

'Then let's do so.'

[21] 'Was it right for you, being affectionately disposed toward your child, to go off and leave her? Let's take her mother instead. Doesn't she feel affection for her daughter?'

[22] 'Of course she does.'

'Then should she, too, have left her?'

\* The translation assumes that the phrase 'good and natural' is repeated, which the argument seems to require.

'No.'

'And the nurse – does she have affectionate feelings toward the girl?'

'She does.'

'So should she, also, have left her?'

'Certainly not.'

'And her personal slave and teacher, doesn't he have feelings for her?'

'Yes.'

[23] 'I suppose that means that he, too, should have gone off and left her – the result being that, owing to this very great affection on the part of parents as well as guardians, the girl would have been completely forsaken by those who love and protect her, to die in the company of people who had no part in bringing her up, and therefore no special feelings for her.'

'I can hardly suppose so.'

[24] 'In fact, it is unfair and illogical to say that people whose affection is the equal of yours should not be permitted to do what you claim was justified in your case owing to this very great affection you profess.'

'True enough.'

[25] 'I mean, if you were sick, would you want your family, your wife, children and the rest, to be so caring as to walk away from you and leave you to yourself?'

'No.'

[26] 'And would you want to be so loved by them that, because of their love, you would always suffer sickness in isolation? Isn't that more like the affection you pray your enemies would show you, that they should go away and leave you be? And if so, the inescapable conclusion is that what you did was no act of affection at all.'

[27] 'Well, it had to have been something that affected you so much that you walked out on your child. It might be related to the impulse that made a man at Rome cover his head while his favourite horse was running, and who later required sponges to be revived when his horse unexpectedly won. [28] The precise explanation for such behaviour might be out of place here. For now, assuming that philosophy contains at least a grain of

truth, it's enough to be convinced that you will not find it by looking for any cause outside yourself. The same thing is always the reason for our doing or not doing something, for saying or not saying something, for being elated or depressed, for going after something or avoiding it. [29] It's the same reason that you're here now listening to me, and I'm saying the things that I'm now saying – [30] our opinion that all these things are right.'

'Of course.'

'If we saw things differently we would act differently, in line with our different idea of what is right and wrong. [31] This, then, was the cause of Achilles' lamentations – not the fact that Patroclus died, since other people don't carry on so when a friend or companion dies – but the fact that he *chose* to lament. [32] The same cause lies behind your desertion of your daughter – you thought it was a good idea at the time. Conversely, if you stay with her, it would be for the same reason. Now you are about to return to Rome; that is your decision – but if it changes, you won't go. [33] In other words, it isn't death, pain, exile or anything else you care to mention that accounts for the way we act, only our opinion about death, pain and the rest.'

[34] 'Well, have I convinced you of this, or not?'

'You have,' the man said.

'As the cause is, so is the result. [35] Whenever we do something wrong, then, from now on we will not blame anything except the opinion on which it's based; and we will try to root out wrong opinions with more determination than we remove tumours or infections from the body. [36] By the same token, we will acknowledge opinion as the source of our good behaviour too. [37] But wife, child, slave or neighbour – in the future we won't name any of them as authors of the evil in our lives, in the knowledge that, unless we judge things in a particular light, we won't act in the corresponding manner. And we, not externals, are the masters of our judgements.'

'Agreed.'

[38] 'So, starting today, we won't trouble to assess or analyse land, slaves, horses or dogs as to their quality or condition – only our opinions.'

'Well, I hope so,' the man said.

[39] 'You see, you are going to have to become a student again – that universal figure of fun – if you really mean to subject your opinions to honest examination. And you know as well as I do that this assignment can't be completed overnight.'

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I 18 *Don't be angry with wrongdoers*

[1] Philosophers say that people are all guided by a single standard. When they assent to a thing, it is because they feel it must be true, when they dissent, it is because they feel something isn't true, and when they suspend judgement, it is because they feel that the thing is unclear. [2] Similarly, they say that in the case of impulse people feel that its object must be to their advantage, and that it is impossible to consider any one thing advantageous and desire something different, or consider one thing right and have an impulse to do something else.

If all this is true, then what grounds do we have for being angry with anyone? [3] We use labels like 'thief' and 'robber' in connection with them, but what do these words mean? They merely signify that people are confused about what is good and what is bad. So should we be angry with them, or should we

pity them instead? [4] Show them where they go wrong and you will find that they'll reform. But unless they see it, they are stuck with nothing better than their usual opinion as their practical guide.

[5] 'Well, shouldn't we do away with thieves and degenerates?'

Try putting the question this way: [6] 'Shouldn't we rid ourselves of people deceived about what's most important, people who are blind – not in their faculty of vision, their ability to distinguish white from black – but in the moral capacity to distinguish good from bad?' [7] Put it that way, and you'll realize how inhumane your position is. It is as if you were to say, 'Shouldn't this blind man, and this deaf man, be executed?' [8] Because if loss of the greatest asset involves the greatest harm, and someone is deprived of their moral bearings, which is the most important capacity\* they have – well, why add anger to their loss? [9] If you must be affected by other people's misfortunes, show them pity instead of contempt. Drop this readiness to hate and take offence. [10] Who are you to use those common curses, like 'These damned fools,' etc.? [11] Let them be. Since when are you so intelligent as to go around correcting other people's mistakes?† We get angry because we put too high a premium on things that they can steal. Don't attach such value to your clothes, and you won't get angry with the thief who takes them. Don't make your wife's external beauty her chief attraction, and you won't be angry with the adulterer. [12] Realize that the thief and the adulterer cannot touch what's yours, only what is common property everywhere and not under your control. If you make light of those things and ignore them, who is left to be angry with? As long as you honour material things, direct your anger at yourself rather than the thief or adulterer.

\* The translation of §8 assumes Schenkl's supplement to the text: ἡ τῶν μεγίστων ἀπώλειά ἐστιν μέγιστον δ' ἐν ἐκάστῳ . . .

† The following reading is assumed in the translation of §§10–11 (conjectural supplements in brackets): μὴ [εἰσενέγκ]ης τὰς φωνὰς ταύτας ἃς οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν φ[ιλοσοφούν]των 'τούτους οὖν τοὺς καταράτους καὶ μιαινοὺς [μωροὺς]. 'Ἐστω· σὺ πῶς ποτ' ἀπεσοφώθης ἄφνω [οὕτως ἢν' ἄλλοις] χαλεπὸς εἶ.

[13] Look at it this way. You have beautiful clothes and your neighbour does not. You have a window and want to give them an airing. The neighbour does not know what man's good consists in, but imagines it means having beautiful clothes – the opinion you happen to share. [14] It's a foregone conclusion that he's going to try and steal them. I mean, when starving people see you gobbling down food all by yourself, you know one of them will make a grab at it. So don't provoke them – don't air your clothes at the window!

[15] Something similar happened to me the other day. I keep an iron lamp by my household shrine. Hearing a noise from my window, I ran down and found the lamp had been lifted. I reasoned that the thief who took it must have felt an impulse he couldn't resist. So I said to myself, 'Tomorrow you'll get a cheaper, less attractive one made of clay.' [16] A man only loses what he has. 'I lost clothes.' Yes, because you had clothes. 'I have a pain in the head.' Well, at least you don't have a pain in the horns, right? Loss and sorrow are only possible with respect to things we own.

[17] 'But the tyrant will chain –' What will he chain? Your leg. 'He will chop off –' What? Your head. What he will never chain or chop off is your integrity. That's the reason behind the ancient advice to 'know yourself'.

[18] We should discipline ourselves in small things, and from there progress to things of greater value. [19] If you have a headache, practise not cursing. Don't curse every time you have an earache. And I'm not saying that you can't complain, only don't complain with your whole being. If your servant is slow to bring you a bandage, don't roll around and yell, 'Everybody hates me!' Who wouldn't hate such a person? [20] Walk upright and free, trusting in the strength of your moral convictions, not the strength of your body, like an athlete. You weren't meant to be invincible by brute force, like a pack animal. [21] You are invincible if nothing outside the will can disconcert you.

So I run through every scenario and consider them as an athlete might: 'He lasted the first round; how will he do in the second? [22] What if it's hot? What if it's the Olympics?' Similarly: 'If you entice him with money, he will turn up his



nose. But what if it's a pretty girl – whom he meets in the dark? What if you tempt him with fame? Or test him with censure – or applause? Or death?' All these he can handle. [23] But what if it's really sweltering – that is, what if he's drunk? Or delirious? Or dreaming?<sup>26</sup> If he can come through safely under all these conditions – well, that's the invincible 'athlete' so far as I am concerned.

### I 19 *How we should act towards the powerful*

[1] A person who enjoys some advantage, or just believes they do, will invariably grow to be arrogant, especially if they are uneducated. [2] The tyrant, for example, will say to you, 'My power is supreme.'

'Will you do something for me then? I want uncurbed desire. Do you even have it to give? I want my aversion error-free. Do you have that? How about a faculty of impulse that is faultless? [3] No, you have no connection to that. Look, you entrust yourself to the pilot's expertise when on board ship, and to the superior skill of the driver when you are in a carriage. [4] It's no different with other skills. So what does *your* advantage amount to?'

'Everybody gives me their attention and respect.'

'Right, and I pay attention to my blackboard, wiping it, and washing it; and for my oil flask I'll even drive a nail in the wall. Does that make these things better than me? No – it just means that they are useful to me somehow. I look after my horse too, [5] I wash its feet and brush its coat. The fact is, everyone looks after themselves; if they curry favour with you it's as if they're currying their horse. Who is there who respects you as a human being? [6] Who wants to be like you, to emulate you the way people emulated Socrates?'

'But I can cut off your head.'

'Good point; I had forgotten that I should look out for you as I would look out for some virus or infection, and erect an altar to you on the model of the Altar of Fever at Rome.<sup>27</sup>

[7] 'What frightens most people and keeps them subdued? It can't be the tyrant and his bodyguards; what nature has made free can only be disturbed or hampered by itself. [8] A person's own thoughts unnerve them. If a tyrant threatens to chain our leg, whoever holds his leg in high regard will beg for mercy, whereas the person who cares more for his character will answer back, "Go ahead and chain it, if that's what you want."'

'And you don't care?'

'I don't care.'

'Just wait, I'll show you who's in charge!'

[9] 'How do you propose to do that? Zeus himself has given me my freedom; he was not going to allow any son of his to be enslaved. You are master of my corpse, come help yourself to *that*.'

[10] 'What about when you petition me for a favour, isn't that proof of your regard?'

'No, it's me looking after myself. If you press the point, I will concede that in the process I give you the same attention I give my dishes.'

[11] 'Look, this is not selfishness, it's the nature of the beast; everything we do is done for our own ends. The sun moves across the sky for its own ends.<sup>28</sup> Even Zeus acts for his own aims. [12] But when Zeus wants to be "Rain-Bringer", or "Grain-Giver", or "Father of Gods and Men", it's obvious that he can only gain his goals and earn his epithets by doing some benefit for the world at large. [13] In the same way he made the rational animal, man, incapable of attaining any of his private ends without at the same time providing for the community.'

[14] 'The upshot is that it is not anti-social to be constantly acting in one own's self-interest. [15] We do not expect someone, after all, to be indifferent regarding himself and his welfare. It's the basis of our principle of appropriation,<sup>29</sup> the instinct that drives everyone's behaviour. [16] Consequently when people are mistaken in the views they hold about things outside the will – thinking that they are good or evil – they naturally are going to grovel before tyrants. [17] And if only it ended there! But they grovel before the tyrant's lackies too. Tell me,

how do underlings suddenly become sages when the emperor elevates them to the post of bathroom attendant? Why are we suddenly saying "Felicio's<sup>30</sup> advice to me was very astute." [18] I hope he gets kicked out of the toilet, so I can see you change your mind again and declare publicly that he's a fool.

[19] 'Epaphroditus once owned a slave, a shoemaker, whom he sold because he was no good. As chance would have it, he was bought by one of the imperial household and became shoemaker to Caesar. You should have seen Epaphroditus flatter him then! [20] "And how is my friend Felicio today?" [21] Whenever one of us asked, "Where is the master?" he would be told, "He is in conference with Felicio." [22] Hadn't he sold him off because he was useless? [23] How did he become so knowledgeable all of a sudden? Well, that's what comes of valuing anything not under control of the will. [24] Someone is raised to the office of tribune and accepts congratulations on every hand. One person kisses his eyes, another his cheek, his slaves even kiss his hands. When he gets home, he finds lamps being lit in his honour. [25] He mounts the Capitol, where he offers a sacrifice of thanks. Now who, I ask you, has ever offered sacrifice for right desires, or for impulses in agreement with nature? We only thank the gods, it seems, for what we popularly suppose are the good things in life.

[26] 'A man spoke with me today about accepting a priesthood of Augustus.<sup>31</sup> I told him not to touch it. "You will lay out a lot of money for little in return."'

[27] 'But the clerk will add my name to public contracts.'

'Are you planning to be there every time a contract is signed, so you can announce to the assembled, "That's my name he's writing down there"?' [28] Even if you can attend these signing ceremonies now, what will you do when you die?

'But my name will survive me.'

'Carve it in stone and it will survive you just as well. Outside Nicopolis, though, no one is going to remember you.'

[29] 'But I get to wear a crown of gold.'

'If you have your heart set on wearing crowns, why not make one out of roses – you will look even more elegant in that.'

I 28 *That we should not be angry with people; and  
what people account great and small*

[1] The cause of our assenting to the truth of something is that it appears to be fact. [2] And it is impossible to assent to anything that does *not* appear to be fact. Why? It is the mind's nature: it will assent to the truth, reject what is false and suspend judgement in doubtful cases.

[3] Here, I will prove it to you: feel, if you can, that it is night now. 'Impossible.' *Don't* feel that it is now day. 'Impossible.' Feel, or don't feel, that the number of stars is even. 'Impossible.' [4] So when someone assents to a false proposition, be sure that they did not want to give their assent, since, as Plato says, 'Every soul is deprived of the truth against its will.'<sup>47</sup> [5] They simply mistook for true something false.

Now, with respect to our actions, the case is analogous, only instead of true and false we react to impressions of right and wrong, good and bad, honest and dishonest. [6] And it is impossible to think that an action will do us good and not choose to do it.

[7] What about Medea, though – she who says:

*I know that the acts I intend are wrong*

*But anger is the master of my intentions.*

That only amounts to saying that she thinks gratifying her anger by exacting revenge on her husband is preferable to keeping her children safe.<sup>48</sup> [8] 'Yes, but she is in error.' Well, demonstrate to her clearly that she is in error and she will not act on her idea. As long as you don't lay it out for her, though, she has nothing besides her own idea of right and wrong to guide her. [9] So don't get angry at the poor woman for being confused about what's most important, and accordingly mutating from human being to snake. Pity her instead. We take pity on the blind and lame, why don't we pity people who are blind and lame in respect of what matters most? [10] Whoever keeps in mind that our actions are all determined by our impressions, which can either be right or wrong – now, if the impression is correct, we are innocent, but if it is incorrect we pay for it

ourselves, since it is impossible that someone else should be penalized for our error – whoever keeps this in mind will not be angry or upset with anyone, won't curse, blame, resent or malign anyone either.

[11] 'So in your view great tragedies are merely the result of this – somebody's "impression"?'

The result of that and that alone. [12] You take the *Iliad*: it's nothing but people's impressions and how they dealt with them. An impression made Paris rob Menelaus of his wife, and an impression got Helen to run away with him. [13] Now, if an impression had come to Menelaus that perhaps he was better off losing such a wife – well, that would have meant the loss to us not just of the *Iliad* but of the *Odyssey* as well.

[14] 'So you're saying that matters so great owe their origin to something so trivial?'

But what do you mean by 'matters so great'? Wars, factions, the loss of many men, the razing of cities – tell me what's so 'great' about all that? [15] What's so great about slaughtering many sheep or cattle, or burning a lot of storks' or swallows' nests? [16]

'Can you really compare the two?' Why not? In the one case human bodies are lost, in the other case the dead happen to be farm animals. People's houses burn, so do storks' nests. [17] What's so earth-shaking or awful in that? Show me how a house, considered merely as shelter, is better than a stork's nest. [18] 'How can a stork be compared with a human being?' Where the body is concerned, there is lots of similarity, only in man's case his body inhabits houses composed of bricks and timber, while storks' nests are made of sticks and mud.

[19] 'So is there no distinction between a person and a stork?'

Of course there is, but not in regard to these externals. [20] Reflect and you'll realize that man excels in other respects: in taking cognisance of his own behaviour; in being sociable, trustworthy and honourable; in learning from his own mistakes; in brains. [21] What counts as good and bad for man can be found precisely in those respects in which he differs from the beasts. If his special qualities are kept safe behind stout walls, and he does not lose his honour, trustworthiness or

intelligence, then the man is saved. But lose or take away any of these qualities and the man himself is lost.

[22] Everything significant depends on this. Did Paris' tragedy lie in the Greeks' attack on Troy, when his brothers began to be slaughtered? [23] No; no one is undone by the actions of others. That was the destruction of storks' nests. His tragedy lay in the loss of the man who was honest, trustworthy, decent and respectful of the laws of hospitality. [24] Wherein did Achilles' tragedy lie? The death of Patroclus? Not at all. It was that he gave in to anger, that he whined about losing a mere woman and lost sight of the fact that he was there not for romance but for war. [25] Those are the genuine human tragedies, the city's siege and capture – when right judgements are subverted; when *thoughts* are undermined.

[26] 'Women are driven into captivity, children are enslaved, and men are put to the sword. Is none of this bad?'

[27] What's the basis for adding that description? Let me in on it too.

'Why don't you explain instead how they are *not* evils?'

[28] Let's turn to our standards, produce our preconceptions. I mean, this is what flabbergasts me. If there's a question about weight, we don't formulate a judgement at random; if it's a matter of judging straight and crooked, we don't make our decision based on whim. [29] If the truth of the case makes any difference to us at all, then none of us operates in the dark. [30] Yet when it comes to the first and foremost cause of good and bad conduct; when it's a matter of doing well or ill, of failure or success – only then do we proceed blindly and erratically, only then are we found to lack anything like a scale or measure. A sense impression appears and right away I react. [31] Am I better than Agamemnon and Achilles, insofar as they do and suffer such wrongs by following their impressions, while the impression does not satisfy me? [32] Is there any tragedy with a different source? What is the *Atreus* of Euripides? An impression. The *Oedipus* of Sophocles? An impression. The *Phoenix*? An impression. *Hippolytus*?<sup>49</sup> An impression. [33] What kind of person, then, pays no attention to the matter of impressions,

do you think? Well, what do we call people who accept every one indiscriminately?

'Madmen.'

And do we act any differently?

## I 29 *On steadfastness*

[1] The essence of good and evil consists in the condition of our character. [2] And externals are the means by which our character finds its particular good and evil. [3] It finds its good by not attaching value to the means. Correct judgements about externals make our character good, as perverse or distorted ones make it bad.

[4] God has fixed this law, and says, 'If you want something good, get it from yourself.' But you say, 'No, I'll get it from another.' I say, 'No – get it from yourself.' [5] If a tyrant threatens me at court, I say, 'What is he threatening?' If he says, 'I will put you in chains,' I say, 'He is threatening my hands and feet.' [6] If he says, 'I will behead you,' I say, 'He is threatening my neck.' If he says, 'I will throw you into prison,' I say, 'He is threatening my entire body'; if he threatens exile, I say the same. [7] 'Well, then, aren't *you* threatened, even a little?' If I feel that these things are nothing to me, then no. [8] But if I fear for any of them, then, yes, it is I who am threatened.

Who is there left for me to fear, and over what has he control? Not what is in my power, because no one controls that except myself. As for what is not in my power, in that I take no interest.

[9] 'So do you philosophers teach contempt for rulers?'

Not at all. You don't find any of us preaching defiance of them within their range of competence. [10] My body, my property, my standing in society, my friends – they can have them all. And I challenge anyone to say that I encourage others to lay claim to those things.

[11] 'Yes,' the king says, 'but I want control over your judgements too.' Who gave you that power? You cannot add the

judgements of others to your conquests. [12] 'I will win by way of fear.' You do not seem to realize that the mind is subject only to itself. It alone can control it, [13] which shows the force and justice of God's edict: the strong shall always prevail over the weak. [14] 'Ten are stronger than one.' Yes, for what, though? For taking people captive, for killing or dragging them off, for taking away their property. For main force, yes, ten are better than one. [15] But one person with right judgements is superior to ten without. Numbers here are irrelevant. Put them in the balance, the person with correct ideas will outweigh all the others.

[16] 'To think of the indignities Socrates suffered at the hands of the Athenians!' Not 'Socrates,' stupid, express yourself more carefully: 'To think that Socrates' poor body should have been seized and hauled off to prison by men stronger than it, that somebody gave his poor body hemlock, that it grew progressively colder until it was dead.' [17] What seems unjust, or outrageous, in this, or worth blaming the gods for? Didn't Socrates have resources to compensate? [18] Where was the essence of the good for him – and who is more to be heeded in that regard, him or you? 'Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot harm me,'<sup>50</sup> he says, and: 'If it pleases the gods, so be it.'

[19] Produce a person who can get the better of someone whose judgements are superior. You can't, though, try as you might. This is God's law and nature's: 'Let the best man win.' But 'best' in his area of expertise. [20] One body is stronger than another body, many bodies are stronger than one; a thief has the advantage here over one who is not a thief. [21] This is how I came to lose my lamp:<sup>51</sup> the thief was better than I am in staying awake. But he acquired the lamp at a price: he became a thief for its sake, for its sake, he lost his ability to be trusted, for a lamp he became a brute. And he imagined he came out ahead!

[22] Fine words, you may say – but now I have been seized by the cloak and am being dragged downtown. Bystanders shout, 'Hey, philosopher, what good did your views do you after all? Look, you're being hauled off to prison and soon will

be beheaded.' [23] Tell me, what *Introduction to Philosophy* could I have read that would have saved me from being dragged away if a stronger man grabs me by the cloak; or could have kept me out of prison if I am assaulted by a gang of ten? [24] What philosophy has taught me, though, is to be indifferent to events beyond the will's control. [25] Haven't you profited in this respect too? So don't look for help from philosophy except in areas where you have learned that help from it can be found. [26] As I sit in prison I can say, 'Whoever laughs at me is deaf to the real meaning of words, can't understand what they hear, and doesn't even care to know what it is philosophers say or do. Let them be.'

[27] But the answer comes: 'Come out of prison.' If you have no further need of me in prison, I'll come out; if you need me, I'll go back in again. [28] 'How long will you keep this up?' For as long as the mind chooses to be with the body. But when the mind no longer consents, then you can take my body, and farewell to it. [29] Only, we must not part with it rashly or irrationally, or on trivial pretext. Because, again, God does not wish it. He needs us, he needs the world that we help populate. If he sounds the signal for retreat, though, as he did for Socrates, we must obey the signal as if it came from our commander-in-chief.

[30] Well, should we try telling this to the ignorant mob? [31] What would be the point? It's enough if we are convinced of it ourselves. When children come up to us clapping their hands and shouting, 'Today is good Saturnalia,' do we say, 'The Saturnalia is not "good"?' Of course not, we clap our hands right along with them. [32] As for you, if you can't change a person's mind, realize that he is no more than a child – and clap hands with him. And if you can't bring yourself to do that, then just keep quiet.

[33] It is essential that we remember this, so that, when troubles arise, we will know that it's time to exhibit what we've learned. [34] A student fresh out of school who gets into difficulty is like someone practised in the solving of syllogisms; if anyone gives him an easy one, he says, 'Give me a knotty one instead, I want a bit of practice.' In the same way, athletes don't

like to be paired with pushovers. [35] 'He can't lift me,' one says, 'this other guy is better built.' No, when the crisis comes, we groan and say, 'I wanted to keep on learning.' Keep learning what? If you didn't learn these things in order to demonstrate them in practice, what *did* you learn them for?

[36] I suppose there might be some who are sitting here losing patience and thinking, 'Why don't I get to face the kind of challenge he did? I am growing old in a corner, when I could be winning a crown at Olympia! When will I be nominated for a similar trial?'

That is the attitude that all of you should adopt. [37] There are gladiators at Rome who get frustrated if they are not called out and matched with an opponent, all the while begging God and their own supervisors to be allowed to do battle one-on-one. None of you here shows anything like the same mettle. [38] Which is why I would like to escape to Rome to see my favourite wrestler in action, how *he*, at least, puts policy into practice.

[39] 'These are not the circumstances that I want.' Is it up to you to choose them? You have been given that particular body, these particular parents and brothers, this particular social position and place to live. You come to me hoping that I can somehow change these circumstances for you, not even conscious of the assets that are already yours that make it possible to cope with any situation you face. [40] 'It is yours to choose the exercise, mine to manage it well.' Right, but instead you say, 'Don't set me that kind of hypothetical argument, give me that one instead; don't give me that compound proposition, give me that other one.' [41] The time is coming when actors of tragedy will identify with their masks, their high-heeled boots, and their long robe. Wake up, those are props representing your circumstances and situation. [42] Say something so that we'll know whether you are a tragic actor or the comic relief – because of the costume you two have in common. [43] Does the tragic actor disappear, if you take away his boots and mask and bring him onstage a mere shadow of his former self – or is he there still? If he has the right voice, he remains.

[44] So it is in life: take a governorship. 'I take it and, when

I take it, I show how a real philosopher acts.' [45] Take off your senator's robe and put on beggar's rags – and let's have a look at you then. 'Well, so what? I still have the gift of a fine voice to show off.' [46] What role do you appear in now? As a witness called by God. [47] 'Step forward, you, and bear witness for me; you earned the right to represent me as a witness. Is anything good or bad that is independent of your will? Do I do any man harm? Have I put each man's advantage under the control of anyone except himself?' What witness do you bear God? [48] 'I'm in difficulty, lord, and pitiable: no one cares about me, no one helps me; I'm the object of universal scorn.' [49] Is that the witness you are going to bear, making a mockery of God's summons, when he honoured you and judged you worthy to be his public spokesman?

[50] But what if someone in authority pronounces you godless and atheistic?<sup>52</sup> How are you affected? 'I have been judged godless and atheistic.' [51] Nothing more? 'Nothing.' If he had passed judgement on a conditional argument, and said, 'The proposition that "If it is day, it is light" I declare to be false, what has happened to the conditional? Who is judged in this case? Who has been condemned – the conditional, or the person who got it wrong?'

[52] Well, then, who is this man who is empowered to pass judgement on you? Does he know anything about what is religious or irreligious? Has he studied and learned about it? Where, and from whom? [53] You know, a musician has no consideration for anyone who mistakes the highest string on the lyre for the lowest; and anyone who affirms that, in a circle, lines that extend from the centre to the circumference can be unequal is not going to win the respect of mathematicians. [54] So – a true philosopher is under no obligation to respect vulgar opinion as to what is religious or irreligious, what is just or unjust. What dishonour he brings on philosophers in general if he did! That's not what you learned here.

[55] Wouldn't you rather leave petty arguments about these subjects to do-nothings who sit in a corner and receive their little stipend, or get nothing and whine about it? Step forward and make use of what you've learned. [56] It isn't more logic

chopping that is needed – our Stoic texts are full of that. What we need now are people to apply their learning and bear witness to their learning in their actions. [57] Please, be the one to take on this character, I am tired in my teaching of invoking examples from the past, I want to be able to hold up an example from my own time.

[58] Consideration of these factors belongs to people who have the leisure for it; because man is an animal made for abstract thought. [59] But, for our honour's sake, let's not be seen studying them as if we were slaves who have run away. We should sit composed, without distraction, listening now to the tragic actor, now to the musician – not act like escapees who are moved to praise the performers while continually glancing nervously around, and who come apart completely if their master's name is dropped. [60] It is beneath the dignity of philosophers to study nature in this spirit. For what does 'master' mean? Man is not the master of another man, only death and life are, pleasure and pain.

So bring Caesar and not these other things before me and I am resolute. [61] But when he comes in thunder and lightning brandishing these things, and I show fear in response, in effect I have been brought face to face with my master, just like a runaway slave. [62] Even while I have a reprieve from these factors, my attention to the performance is no better than the slave's. I wash, drink, sing, but all in a spirit of gloom and foreboding. [63] If, however, I liberate myself from my master – which is to say, from the emotions that make my master frightening – what troubles can I have? No man is my master any longer.

[64] Well, is it our duty to announce these truths to everyone? No, instead we need to make allowances for people without the benefit of education, and say to ourselves, 'He is telling me to do this because he imagines it's good for himself as well; so I can't blame him.' [65] Socrates himself forgave his jailer when he began to drink the hemlock, and the man broke down in tears, saying, 'It shows great generosity of spirit for him to grieve for us.' [66] Does he say to the jailer, 'That's why we wouldn't let the women in!' No, he only says that to his close

friends – to those who can assimilate it. The jailer, though, he indulges as he would a child.

### I 30 *How to prepare for trouble*

[1] In the event that you are haled before someone wielding the reigns of power, remember that there is somebody else looking down from above, and you have to answer first to *him*. [2] So he examines you: 'How did you categorize exile, imprisonment, chains, death and disgrace, when you were in school?'

'I said they were indifferent.'

[3] 'And what do you call them now? They haven't changed, I presume?'

'No.'

'Well, have *you* changed?'

'No.'

'Then define for me now what the "indifferents" are.'

'Whatever things we cannot control.\*'

'Tell me the upshot.'

'They are nothing to me.'

[4] 'Remind me what you thought was good.'

'The will and the right use of impressions.†'

'And the goal of life is what?'

'To follow God.'

[5] 'And do you stand by that now?'

'I say it even now.'

'Go, then, in confidence, holding fast to these convictions. You'll see what it's like to be a young person with an education, alongside people who have none. [6] I promise that you will feel somewhat like this: "Why do we serve such a long and difficult apprenticeship – in preparation to face nonentities? [7] Is this what 'authority' meant? Are the courtyards, the palace

\* The translation assumes the addition of τὰ ἀπροαίρετα after ἀδιάφορα.

† Emending the text to read: προαίρεσις καὶ χρήσις οἷα δεῖ φαντασιῶν.

staff, the guards no more than this? Was this why I sat through so many lectures? It all amounts to nothing – and I was expecting to be overwhelmed.””

## BOOK II

### II 2 *On tranquillity*

[1] If you are headed to court, consider carefully what it is you want to keep and in what area you want to win. [2] If you want to keep your character in line with nature, you have every hope of success, all the means you need, and not a worry in the world. [3] Because if you want to keep what is yours by right and is by nature free – and these are the only things you want – you have nothing to worry about. No one else controls them or can take them away from you. [4] If you want to be a man of honour and a man of your word, who is going to stop you? You say you don't want to be obstructed or forced to do something against your will – well, who is going to force you to desire things that you don't approve, or dislike something against your better judgement?

[5] Ah, but they will threaten you with punishments that overawe you. But how can they make you think of those sufferings as something you are obligated to avoid? [6] As long as desire and aversion are under your control, there is nothing more to worry about. [7] There is your opening statement, your exposition, your proof – and there lies success, the last word, and acquittal. [8] Which is why Socrates, when he was told to prepare himself for trial, said, 'Haven't I been preparing for it my whole life?' [9] Preparing for it how? 'I've tended to my



own affairs, and never done anything in violation of the law, either publicly or privately.'

[10] If, however, you want to keep hold of externals – your body, belongings and reputation – then my advice to you is that your preparations better begin early and will have to be long. You will need to research the character of the judge, of course, and make a study of your opponent too. [11] If groveling is called for, then be prepared to grovel – to weep and holler too. [12] Whenever externals are more important to you than your own integrity, then be prepared to serve them the remainder of your life. Don't hedge and agree to be their slave, then change your mind later; [13] commit to one or the other position at once and without reserve. Choose to be either free or a slave, enlightened or a fool, a thoroughbred or a nag. Either resign yourself to a life of abuse till you die, or escape it immediately. For God's sake, don't put up with years of abuse, and *then* change your mind! [14] This humiliation can be avoided before it begins: just decide now what you think is truly good and bad.\*

[15] I mean, do you think that, if Socrates had any concern for what others could do to him, he would have stood before the court and said, 'Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but cannot harm me'? [16] Do you think he was fool enough not to see that this approach was going to lead to a very different result?<sup>5</sup> So why not make remarks that are more provocative?†

[17] It's like my friend Heraclitus,<sup>6</sup> who had a lawsuit about a piece of property on Rhodes. After proving to the jury that he had right on his side, he came to his concluding remarks and said, 'But I am not going to plead with you, and I don't care what you decide. You are more on trial here than I am.' With the result that he sabotaged his case. [18] And why was it necessary? Don't plead – but don't go on to say, 'I won't plead' – not unless there is a point in provoking the jurors deliberately,

\* The remainder of §14 is probably an intrusion and has been omitted from the translation; it does not suit the context, and does not even make sense on its own: 'Where truth is also. Where truth and nature are, there is caution. Where truth is, there is confidence, where nature is.'

† Reading προσηρηθῆναι for προσηρηθῆναι.

as in Socrates' case. [19] As for you, if you're planning some such parting shot, why bother to speak at all, why even show up at court? [20] Because if you want to be crucified, just wait, and the cross will come. But if reason demands that you appear and do your best to be persuasive, you must do what is entailed – while safeguarding what is yours.

[21] Thus, it is stupid to say, 'Tell me what to do!'<sup>7</sup> What should I tell you? It would be better to say, 'Make my mind adaptable to any circumstance.' [22] Saying 'Tell me what to do' is like an illiterate saying, 'Tell me what to write whenever I'm presented with a name.' [23] If I say 'John' and then someone else comes along and gives him 'Jane' instead of 'John' to write, what is going to happen? How is he going to write it? [24] If you have learned your letters, though, you are ready for anything anyone dictates. If you are not prepared, I don't know what I should tell you to do. Because there may be events that call for you to act differently – and what will you do or say then? [25] So hold on to this general principle<sup>8</sup> and you won't need specific advice. If you hanker after externals you are going to be twirled round and round at the will of your master. [26] 'Who's my "master"?' Whoever controls what you desire or dislike.

## II 5 *How confidence and carefulness are compatible*

[1] Material things *per se* are indifferent, but the use we make of them is not indifferent. [2] The question, then, is how to strike a balance between a calm and composed attitude on the one hand, and a conscientious outlook that is neither slack nor careless on the other.<sup>13</sup> Model yourself on card players. [3] The

chips don't matter, and the cards don't matter; how can I know what the deal will be? But making careful and skilful use of the deal – that's where my responsibility begins.<sup>14</sup> [4] So in life our first job is this, to divide and distinguish things into two categories: externals I cannot control, but the choices I make with regard to them I do control. Where will I find good and bad? [5] In me, in my choices. Don't ever speak of 'good' or 'bad', 'advantage' or 'harm', and so on, of anything that is not your responsibility.

[6] 'Well, does that mean that we shouldn't care how we use them?'

Not at all. In fact, it is morally wrong not to care, and contrary to our nature. [7] Be careful how you use them, because it's not unimportant – but at the same time be calm and composed, because things in themselves don't matter. [8] Where it *does* matter, no one can compel me or stand in my way. And where I can be stopped or compelled, well, getting those things is not in my control – and not good or bad in any case. But the way I use them *is* good or bad, and depends on me.

[9] It isn't easy to combine and reconcile the two – the carefulness of a person devoted to externals and the dignity of one who's detached – but it's not impossible. Otherwise happiness would be impossible.<sup>15</sup> [10] It's something like going on an ocean voyage. What can I do? Pick the captain, the boat, the date, and the best time to sail. [11] But then a storm hits. Well, it's no longer my business; I have done everything I could. It's somebody else's problem now – namely the captain's. [12] But then the boat actually begins to sink. What are my options? I do the only thing I am in a position to do, drown – but fearlessly, without bawling or crying out to God, because I know that what is born must also die. [13] I am not Father Time; I'm a human being, a part of the whole, like an hour in a day. Like the hour I must abide my time, and like the hour, pass. [14] What difference does it make whether I go by drowning or disease? I have to go somehow.

[15] You will find that skilled ballplayers do the same thing. It's not the ball they value, it's how well they throw and catch

it that counts as good or bad. [16] That is where the grace and skill lie, the speed and expertise – speed such that I can't catch one of their throws even if I spread out my coat to do it, and skill such that, if I throw the ball, however badly, one of them is bound to catch it. [17] If we are afraid to throw the ball, or nervous about catching it, then the fun is lost; and how can we preserve our composure when we are uncertain about what next to do? 'Throw it,' someone says, 'Don't throw it,' another says, 'Throw it already!' says someone else. It turns into a shouting instead of a sporting match.<sup>16</sup>

[18] Socrates, you might say, knew how to play ball. In his case, the arena was the courtroom. 'Tell me, Anytus,' he said, 'how can you say I don't believe in God? We are agreed, are we not, that there are minor gods and heroes – the children of gods or the mixed issue of gods and men?' [19] Anytus conceded the point. 'Well, if someone acknowledged that there were animals of mixed parentage – half breeds such as mules – don't you think they would also have to believe in the existence of horses or asses – the creatures that produced them?'<sup>17</sup> [20] It's just as if the man were playing ball. Only the ball in his case was life, imprisonment, exile or execution – with the prospect of losing his wife, and having his children reduced to the status of orphans. Those were the stakes of the game, and still he played, and handled the ball with aplomb.

[21] That's what we need: the star athlete's concentration, together with his coolness, as if it were just another ball we were playing with too. To be sure, external things of whatever kind require skill in their use, but we must not grow attached to them; whatever they are, they should only serve for us to show how skilled we are in our handling of them.

It's like weaving: the weaver does not make the wool, he makes the best use of whatever wool he's given. [22] God gives you food and property, and can take them back – your body too. Work with the material you are given. [23] If you come through all right, most people you meet will congratulate you on surviving. A shrewd judge, however, will praise you and share in your pleasure only if he sees that you acted honourably in the case; not, however, if he sees that your success was owed

to anything dishonest. When happiness is come by fairly, others are happy for us too.

[24] 'Then how are some externals said to be in accordance with nature, others contrary to nature?'<sup>18</sup> That only applies to us considered separately. I agree that for my foot it is in accordance with its nature to be clean; but considered as a foot and not separately, it is right and proper for it to tramp through mud, step on needles – there may even be a time when it will have to be amputated for the sake of the body as a whole. It wouldn't be a foot otherwise.

We have to assume that a similar distinction applies to us personally. [25] What are you? A human being. If you think of yourself as a unit apart, then it is in accordance with your nature to live to old age, to be rich, and be healthy. But if your view of yourself involves being part of a whole, then, for the sake of the whole, circumstances may make it right for you to be sick, go on a dangerous journey, endure poverty, even die before your time. Don't complain; [26] just as it would not be a foot, don't you realize that in isolation you would not be a human being? Because what is a human being? Part of a community – the community of gods and men, primarily, and secondarily that of the city we happen to inhabit, which is only a microcosm of the universe *in toto*.

[27] 'And that's why now I'm being put on trial?' And why someone else falls sick, why another undertakes a voyage, why someone else dies, and still another is convicted. In this body, this universe, this community, it is inevitable that each of us faces some such event. [28] Your job, then, is to appear before the court, say what you have to say and make the best of the situation. [29] Then the judge declares you guilty. 'I wish you well, judge. I did my part, you can decide if you did yours.' Because the judge runs a risk too, don't forget.

## II 6 On 'indifference'<sup>19</sup>

[1] The conjunctive argument<sup>20</sup> is indifferent, but how you handle it is not indifferent; it is tantamount to knowledge, opinion, or ignorance. In the same way, life is indifferent, but the use we make of it is not indifferent. [2] So when you hear that even life and the like<sup>21</sup> are indifferent, don't become apathetic; and by the same token, when you're advised to care about them, don't become superficial and conceive a passion for externals.

[3] It is good to be clear about the level of your talent and training. That way, when unfamiliar topics arise, you will know enough to keep still, and not be put out if there are students more advanced than you. [4] You will show your own superiority in logic; and if others are disconcerted over that, mollify them by saying, 'Well, I had a good teacher.' [5] The same applies to subjects that require some practical training; don't pretend you have a particular skill if you don't yet; yield to whoever has the requisite experience; and for your own part take satisfaction in an awareness that your persistence is helping you become expert in the subject yourself.

[6] 'Go pay so-and-so your respects.'

'I call on him – but not on my knees.'

'And you were not let in.'

'Well, you see, I don't know how to break through windows. When I find the door shut, either I have to go through the window or leave.'

[7] 'So, talk to him.'

'OK, I talk to him.'

'How?'

'As an equal.'

[8] But you did not get what you wanted – because of course that was up to him, not you. So don't take responsibility for it. Always remember what is yours, and what belongs to other people, and you won't have trouble. [9] Apropos, Chrysippus said: 'As long as the future is uncertain to me I always hold to those things which are better adapted to

obtaining the things in accordance with nature; for God himself has made me disposed to select them. [10] But if I knew that my destiny at present was to fall ill, I would even wish for it. My foot, too, if it had intelligence, would volunteer to get muddy.'

[11] Look, isn't wheat grown for the express purpose of turning brown, and doesn't it turn brown in preparation for being harvested? It is not grown for its own sake. [12] If it could talk, I suppose it would beg never to be harvested? Come, that's actually a curse we put on people's crop, that it not be brought to harvest. [13] Know that for humans, too, it's no less of a curse not to die – the same as 'Please, God, don't let their wheat ripen, don't let it be brought in.' [14] But because we're the only animals who not only die but are conscious of it even while it happens, we are beset by anxiety. The reason can only be that we do not know who we are, and have not studied what it means to be a human being – the way horse trainers, for instance, learn the ways of horses.

[15] Look at Chrysantas, though: just as he was poised to stab an enemy combatant he heard the trumpet sound retreat and froze; that's how much he set the captain's will above his personal welfare.<sup>22</sup> [16] Yet even when fate calls, not one of us is prepared to obey. We suffer what we suffer not willingly, but with sobs of protest, and call it all 'circumstances'. [17] What are circumstances? If by that you mean your situation, everything is 'circumstances'. But if you mean 'problems', where's the problem in something that was born, dying? [18] Death could come by way of a knife, torture, the sea, a piece of masonry, a despot – why do you care? 'All roads to Hades are of equal length.'<sup>23</sup> [19] Well, to tell you the truth, death by despot is less protracted. No despot ever took six months to cut a throat, whereas a fatal illness often lasts a year. 'Circumstances', 'troubles' – this is all a lot of noise and a clamour of meaningless names.

[20] You say, 'I risk execution by the emperor.'

I face no less a danger here in Nicopolis, where earthquakes are a common occurrence. As to you, aren't you risking your life every time you cross the Adriatic?

[21] 'But even one's opinions can get one into trouble here in Rome.'

Do you mean your own? No one can force you to hold an opinion against your will. And if you are referring to other people's, how can *their* wrong opinions pose any danger to you?

[22] 'I also face the danger of exile.'

What is exile? Being somewhere other than Rome?

'Exactly. My God, what if I'm sent to Gyara?' Well, if that's tolerable for you, you will go; if not, you have the choice of another destination, the place even the person who sent you to Gyara is headed, whether they like it or not.

[23] So why make such a big deal of going to trial? It isn't worth all the preparation. A young man with any talent might well say, 'I wasted my time listening to so many lectures, writing so many compositions, and sitting for so long next to an old man who didn't amount to much himself.'

[24] There is only one thing you need to remember, the rule that distinguishes what is yours from what isn't. Don't ever lay claim to anything belonging to others. [25] Court and prison are two places, one high, the other low. Your character, however, can be kept the same in either place – if you decide it should. [26] We will rival Socrates when we can spend our time in prison composing hymns. [27] But considering our attitude up to now, I wonder if in prison we could even stand someone else offering to read us his own compositions.

'Don't bother me; don't you realize the problems I've got?\*' You think I can listen to poetry in my position?

'Why, what is it?'

'I'm sentenced to death!'

'And the rest of us aren't?'

\* reading ἄττα for τὰ.

## II 8 *What is the substance of the good?*

[1] God is helpful. Whatever is good is also helpful. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that the divine nature and the nature of the good will correspond. [2] So what is the divine nature? Is it flesh? Be serious. Do we associate it with real estate and status? Hardly. It is mind, intelligence and correct reason.

[3] So look no further than there for the substance of the good. Of course, you won't find it in plants and animals. In man, however, it consists in just those qualities that distinguish him from other animals. [4] Since plants do not even have the power of perception, 'good' and 'evil' are not applicable to them. Evidently, 'good' and 'bad' presume the power of using impressions. [5] But is that enough? If it is, then you must speak of 'good' in connection with animals besides man, as well as 'happy' and 'unhappy' – [6] but there is a very good reason that you don't. Because, however well they may use impressions, animals lack the ability to reflect on them. Nor should they have it, since they were born to serve, not command. [7] Is the donkey in a position of command? It was created because man needed an animal with a strong back able to carry big loads; the creature had to be able to walk, as well. Which is why it was endowed with the power of using impressions – otherwise it couldn't walk. And that is about the extent of its endowments. [8] After all, if the donkey had also acquired the ability to reflect on its use of impressions, it would quite rightly refuse to obey us and serve our needs. It would, in fact, be mankind's equal and peer.

[9] So if it is absent from plants and animals, it's only logical that you should look for the nature of the good where you ordinarily apply the word. [10] True, they are God's creatures too, but not creatures placed in a position of authority, not parts of God. [11] You, on the other hand, *are* a creature placed in charge, and a particle of God himself; there is a bit of God within you.

[12] Why don't you know of this relation, and of your origins? When you eat, bear in mind who it is exactly you are feeding. When you have sex, reflect who you are during the act.

In conversation, exercise, discourse – do you remember that it is God you are feeding, God you are exercising? You carry God around with you and don't know it, poor fool. [13] Don't imagine I am talking about some external deity made of silver or gold. You carry the living God inside you and are blind to the fact that you desecrate him with your dirty words and dirty thoughts – [14] none of which you would dare repeat if there were even a mere statue of a god near by. God himself is there within, seeing and overhearing everything you do and say – and do you care? You pariah, you have no sense of your own heritage.

[15] What are we anxious about when we graduate a young man from school and out into the real world? That he will make mistakes, eat poorly, have sexual affairs, humiliate himself and go around in rags, or else affect the latest fashions. And why? [16] Because he is ignorant of his personal god and does not realize who goes with him when he leaves school and his former friends. Yet we indulge him when he writes to us to say, 'I wish you here with me.' [17] You have God there with you – who else do you need? Whoever you invite to come and visit – would they tell you any different?

[18] Suppose you were one of Phidias' statues – his Zeus or his Athena.<sup>24</sup> You would certainly have a sense of who you were then, and of who brought you into being. And if you had a brain, you would make an effort to avoid doing anything that would bring shame on either your creator or yourself, such as being caught in an embarrassing position by the spectators come to see you. [19] But Zeus has created you; shouldn't that make you even more careful about the impression you make? What is Phidias compared to Zeus? How, for that matter, can their creations be compared? [20] What other work of art comes ready equipped with the very powers the artist displayed in making it? Do marble statues? No, nor do bronze, gold or ivory ones. The Athena of Phidias, once its arm was raised to support the statue of Victory, has maintained that pose for the duration of its long existence. Zeus' works, on the other hand, are living, breathing creatures, with the power of perception and judgement.

[21] He made you, and you mock him. Why? He not only made you; of all his creatures, you alone were given the power of self-determination. [22] You not only ignore that, you bring shame on the faith he placed in you. You would not have been so negligent in caring for an orphan if God had put one in your way. [23] He has entrusted you to yourself, saying, 'I had no one more dependable than you; just see that he keeps the qualities he was born with: integrity, honour, dignity, patience, calmness and poise.' But you can't even do that.

[24] However, there will be people who say, 'Why is this person so serious and self-important?' If it seems like pretension, it's only because I don't have complete confidence in the principles that I've learned and espouse. I still fear for my own frailty. [25] But grant me the confidence, and I will show you the right look and bearing; then you will see the finished statue all bright and gleaming. [26] And don't expect a study in smugness. After all, the Zeus at Olympia does not project an air of hauteur. He looks at us right in the eye – just the way one ought to look when on the point of saying: *'My word is true and irrevocable.'*<sup>25</sup>

[27] That is the sort of person you'll find I am: trustworthy, honourable, noble and poised. [28] Not, to be sure, immune to death, age or disease, like God, but still prepared to die and face illness with a godlike dignity. [29] That much is mine to do, even if I cannot accomplish the rest.

In short, I will show you that I have the strength – of a philosopher. 'And what strength would that be?' A will that never fails to get what it wants, a faculty of aversion that always avoids what it dislikes, proper impulse, careful purpose and disciplined assent. That's the human specimen you should prepare yourselves to see.

## II 13 *On nerves*

[1] Whenever I see a person suffering from nervousness, I think, well, what can he expect? If he had not set his sights on things outside man's control, his nervousness would end at once. [2] Take a lyre player: he's relaxed when he performs alone, but put him in front of an audience, and it's a different story, no matter how beautiful his voice or how well he plays the instrument. Why? Because he not only wants to perform well, he wants to be well received – and the latter lies outside his control.

[3] He is confident as far as his knowledge of music is

concerned – the views of the public carry no weight with him there. His anxiety stems from lack of knowledge and lack of practice in other areas. Which are what? [4] He doesn't know what an audience is, or what approval from an audience amounts to. Although he knows well enough how to play every note on the guitar, from the lowest to the highest, the approval of the public – what it means and what real significance it has – this he does not know and has made no effort to learn. [5] Necessarily, then, he is going to get nervous and grow pale. Now, I won't go so far as to say that he's not a true musician if I see that he suffers from stage fright. But I can say one thing – several things, in fact.

[6] I can start by calling him a stranger and say, 'This person has no idea where he's living, and for all his time in residence here still doesn't know the laws of the country or its customs. He does not know what is permitted and what is not. Furthermore, he has never taken the trouble to call on a lawyer who will tell him, and explain how things operate here. [7] He won't sign a contract without knowing how to draft one properly, or hiring somebody who does. He isn't casual about signing for loans or offering guarantees. But when it comes to desire, aversion, impulse, plans and projects, he applies himself to all of these without benefit of legal counsel. [8] How do I know? He wants what he cannot have, and does not want what he can't refuse – and isn't even aware of it. He doesn't know the difference between his own possessions and others'. Because, if he did, he would never be thwarted or disappointed.

Or nervous.

Just think: [9] we aren't filled with fear except by things that are bad; and not by them, either, as long as it is in our power to avoid them. [10] So, if externals are neither good nor bad, while everything within the sphere of choice is in our power and cannot be taken away by anyone, or imposed on us without our compliance – then what's left to be nervous about? [11] We agonize over our body, our money, or what the emperor is going to decree – never about anything inside us.

I mean, do we worry whether we are going to make an error in judgement? No, because it is under our control. Or having

an unnatural urge? No again. [12] So if you see someone pale with nerves, be like a doctor who diagnoses liver trouble based on a patient's yellow skin. Say, 'This man's desire and aversion are unhealthy, they aren't functioning properly, they're infected. [13] Because nothing else can account for his change in colour, his shivering, his chattering teeth, and "this constant fretting and shifting from foot to foot"'.<sup>31</sup>

[14] All of which explains why Zeno was not nervous about his meeting with Antigonus.<sup>32</sup> What Zeno valued Antigonus had no power over, and as a philosopher he cared nothing for the things that the king did command. [15] It was Antigonus who was anxious before their meeting. Naturally – he wanted to make a good impression, which was beyond his control. Zeno, for his part, had no wish to please the king; no expert needs validation from an amateur. [16] So what do I need *your* approval for? You don't know the measure of a man, you haven't studied to learn what a good or a bad person is, and how each one gets that way. No wonder you're not a good person yourself.

[17] 'How do you make that out?'

It is not in a good person's nature to grieve, complain or whine; they don't go pale, tremble and say, 'What kind of hearing or reception will he give me?' [18] Idiot, that's his concern – don't concern yourself with other people's business. It's his problem if he receives you badly.

'True.'

And you cannot suffer for another person's fault. So don't worry about the behaviour of others.

[19] 'All right, but I worry about how I will talk to him.'

Can't you talk to him any way you like?

'I'm afraid that I may say something gauche.'

[20] Look, when you are about to spell the name 'Dion', are you afraid that you will slip up?

'No.'

And why not? It's because you have practice in writing the name.

'True.'

And you would have the same confidence reading it.

‘Yes.’

The reason is that any discipline brings with it a measure of strength and confidence in the corresponding arts. [21] Now, you have practice speaking. What else did they teach you at school?

‘Syllogisms and changing arguments.’<sup>33</sup>

But why, if not to be accomplished in conversation? And by accomplished I mean refined, assured, intelligent, not easily flustered or refuted – and fearless, on top of all that.

‘Agreed.’

[22] Well, then, you are in the position of a soldier on horseback who is about to face a mere foot soldier, on ground that you have gone over and he has not. And still you’re nervous?

‘But he can literally kill me!’

[23] Well, then, speak the truth, you sorry specimen, don’t put on airs and call yourself a philosopher. Face up to who your betters are. As long as you have this attachment to the body, be ready to submit to anyone or anything of superior physical force.

[24] As for speaking, Socrates must have practised the art, look at his answer to the Thirty Tyrants, his defence before the jury, his conversations in jail.<sup>34</sup> Diogenes too had practised how to speak, witness the free and easy way he talked to Alexander, Philip, the pirates and the person to whom the pirates sold him as a slave.<sup>35\*</sup> [26] As for you, go back to your work and don’t ever leave it. Settle back in your alcove, think up new syllogisms, and share them with your friends. [27] You are plainly not cut out for the role of public leader.

\* There is a lacuna in the text at this point; a sentence fragment (§25) has been omitted from the translation.



## BOOK III

### III 3 *What is the material proper to the good person and what is the goal they should strive to achieve*

[1] The body is the raw material of the doctor and physical therapist. Land is the farmer's raw material. The raw material of the good man is his mind – his goal being to respond to impressions the way nature intended. [2] As a general rule, nature designed the mind to assent to what is true, dissent from what is false and suspend judgement in doubtful cases. Similarly, it conditioned the mind to desire what is good, to reject what is bad and to regard with indifference what is neither one nor the other. [3] Just as it is not in the power of a banker or retailer to reject Caesar's money – they are forced to make a proportional exchange whether they want to or not – so it is with the soul: [4] when presented with something good it gravitates toward it immediately, as it recoils from anything bad. The soul will never reject a clear impression of good, any more than Caesar's coin can be refused. The actions of gods as well as men are entirely based on this principle.

[5] It follows that the good is preferred over every human association. I care nothing for my father – only for the good.

'Are you that unfeeling?'

I am that way designed; it is the currency God gave me.

[6] The upshot is that, if the good turns out to be something other than decency and fairness, then father, brother, country and the rest can all go hang. [7] Now look, am I supposed to step aside and abandon my good just so you can have yours? Why?

'Because I'm your father.'

But not the good.

'I'm your brother.'

But not the good.

[8] If, however, we locate the good in soundness of character, then it becomes good to maintain these relationships. Whoever gives up some material things also wins the good.

[9] 'My father is laying waste to my inheritance.'

But not harming you.

'My brother will claim more than his share.'

He's welcome to as much as he likes. Will he take a greater share of honesty, loyalty and brotherly love? [10] No; even Zeus cannot deprive you of that fortune – because he chose not to be able to. He entrusted it to me and gave me a share equal to his own – free, clear and unencumbered.

[11] If people have a different currency, just flash it, and whatever is for sale there will be yours in exchange. [12] A corrupt governor has come to power in our province. What currency does he recognize? Silver. Show him silver, then, and you can cart off what you like. Here is an adulterer. His currency takes the form of pretty girls. 'Take the money, and sell me the merchandise.' In this way they are bought and sold. [13] Here is one whose taste runs to boys. Procure him his currency and you can take what you please. Another is devoted to the hunt. Offer him some handsome horse or dog, and he will groan and complain, but in the end sell off whatever he has in order to make your price. You see, another from within<sup>1</sup> forces him to act like this, ever since he designated this his currency.

[14] Here is the primary means of training yourself: as soon as you leave in the morning, subject whatever you see or hear to close study. Then formulate answers as if they were posing questions. Today what did you see – some beautiful woman or handsome man? Test them by your rule – does their beauty have any bearing on your character? If not, forget them. What else did you see? [15] Someone in mourning for the death of a child? Apply your rule. Death too is indifferent, so dismiss it from your mind. A consul crossed your path; apply your rule. What category of thing is a consulship – a good of the mind or

one of matter? If it's the latter, then out with it, it failed our test. If it is nothing to you, reject it.

[16] Now, if we continued to practise this discipline every day from morning to night, we would see some results, by God. [17] As it is, though, we are overcome by every impression that we meet. Only in school – if even there – does our brain briefly come to life. Outside school, whenever we see a person in mourning, we think to ourselves, 'She's crushed.' If we happen to spy a consul, we think, 'There goes one lucky man.' The sight of a person in exile elicits 'How tragic' in response; a beggar prompts us to think, 'Poor guy, he doesn't even have money enough for food.' [18] These are the insidious opinions we need to concentrate hard to expunge. What, after all, are sighing and crying, except opinions? What is 'misfortune'? An opinion. And sectarian strife, dissension, blame and accusation, ranting and raving – [19] they all are mere opinion, the opinion that good and bad lie outside us. Let someone transfer these opinions to the workings of the will, and I personally guarantee his peace of mind, no matter what his outward circumstances are like.

[20] The soul is like a bowl of water, with the soul's impressions like the rays of light that strike the water. [21] Now, if the water is disturbed, the light appears to be disturbed together with it – though of course it is not. [22] So when someone loses consciousness, it is not the person's knowledge and virtues that are impaired, it is the breath<sup>2</sup> that contains them. Once the breath returns to normal, knowledge and the virtues are restored to normal also.<sup>3</sup>